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Advocate of Peace

VOL. LXXIX

NOVEMBER, 1917

NUMBER 10

STARTING DEMOCRACY ANEW

THE old New England town meeting may have been the cradle of some liberties, but it has lost its legs and ribs, and the baby has gone to sleep. We have attended enough New England town meetings to know that they are for the most part non-representative political gatherings where the dominating few gain their political ends, and where the many stay away through disgust or indifference. The type of democracy promoted by the New England town meeting has in any event little economic or social usefulness. Its net result is therefore negligible so far as the promotion of real democracy is concerned. For it is not enough that men and women should have opportunity to vote, they must somehow actually take part in the decisions which affect their lives and happiness.

When a few years ago it was attempted in the city of Rochester to extend the use of the one great democratic institutions peculiar to this nation, namely, the public school, it was discovered that the school equipment belongs to the people and that the people can make use of the school buildings for purposes of discussion and adult education. Shortly after the Rochester experiment the State of Wisconsin opened all of its school buildings to the people by a special act of the legislature, and in one year thirty thousand public meetings were held in those buildings. Thirty-eight of our States now have laws looking toward the wider use of school buildings for public purposes. By a recent act of the legislature of the State of Texas public voting in that State is to take place in the school buildings. Under the auspices of the United States Bureau of Education a systematic campaign is now under way in the interest of the employment of paid social secretaries for civic centers with school buildings as the natural meeting places and headquarters for the people. The States of California, Oregon, and Utah have officially designated their school houses as civic centers.

What is the meaning of these significant movements? Surely, they mean that the people have not lost their sense of the rights and privileges of assembly. It means that they have discovered their rights to use the public-school buildings as places for such assembly. The people of the nation have heard of the cooperative trade movements in Western England, of cooperative farming and distribution in Norway, and of the cooperative societies now apparently the salvation of Russia, and, discovering

as never before the value and significance of the insistent force of self-interest, intelligent persons are discovering the cumulative advantage of going to school to each other. They are saying that "the social mind must be kept alive," and when they say that they seem to know what they mean. And so we find men and women looking around for better methods and modes of expression for the democracy which they believe in and want.

The civic center with headquarters in the public-school building is a natural step for people long accustomed to a population of children organized for democratic co-operative purposes up to fourteen years of age, and it is a logical inference that that form of co-operative association can and ought to be extended. The district school meeting where adults express their responsibilities for the immature is a natural outgrowth of the democracies and idealisms of the home. Sovereignty of parenthood is understandable where the sovereignty of select men, governors, kings, and potentates is not. Fathers and mothers have successfully worked out in their homes the idealisms of the church and the democracies formerly the sole prerogatives of the street corner and the saloon. The school where these are not overlooked is an inspiring extension of the home and as such understandable. The successful home develops the democracy of co-operation. The same is true of the successful school. The same should be true of the successful community co-operative center and forum, where real men and women can most appropriately set up a parliament for themselves and where they can control their affairs in the ways and spirit of real democracy.

Modern political science is confined primarily to organizations run by physical force. Political science may well look to this significant aspect of modern social endeavor. The high cost of living is revealing to hard-headed practical persons enormous wastes particularly in the methods of distribution. The same hard-headed persons will not submit for long to the unnatural and unnecessary expense. They are looking for remedies. They are coming together for purposes of discussion and direct results. They are winning out in North Dakota. When they talk of government by consent they are thinking now in terms of economic as well as political government, and they propose to get the control of the economic forces into their hands. This movement is itself a force greater than physical force because it is these same people who will decide what physical force shall be set up and used for the society which they have in mind. Since

this great force is a real force, different from and greater than any physical force, political science will do well to take cognizance of it. For if the world is to be made safe for democracies, democracies must be made worth while. And unless men and women can practice the arts of democracy in matters of fuel, street cars, and garbage disposal, what hope is there that these same people can be expected to set up larger democracies, call them States, and expect those States to behave themselves orderly and efficiently.

These matters are not foreign, therefore, to the needs of a governed world. The expression of views by men and women cannot long be safely repressed. This war is in no small sense a result of long years of repression and gag rule in a society made up of group organizations mutually suspicious and antagonistic. The goal of this new attempt to fashion democracy is an association of individuals, not of groups, and the society of nations that shall do away with the necessity for war must be an expression of direct popular control. Mr. Hoover said a few days ago, "Unless a democracy can find in itself some solution of organization that is entirely different from the organization of an autocracy, and yet which is equally effective, it cannot defend itself against autocratic organization, and is, therefore, a faith not worth fighting for and one which cannot long survive." If people can learn to control efficiently their religious, economic, and political relations close at hand there will then be some hope that they will be able to control these same relations farther away in the realm of international behavior. Under the auspices of the Academy of Political Science in the city of New York a national conference on foreign relations of the United States was held at Long Beach, N. Y., during the week of May 28 last. Many of the leading men and women of our country participated in the discussions. A valuable volume of the proceedings of the conference has been issued and distributed. There is soon to be another conference for the purposes of further discussion about the foreign relations of the United States. Surely that is hopeful business. But when forty men and women gather together in an old red school house down the village street and around the corner and there solve the questions of transportation of milk, the delivery of mail, or the salaries of teachers, they are also carrying on the business of democracy, a co-operative human enterprise of great significance not for themselves alone, but for the world. For unless democracy can work in matters of "bread," there is little hope of its success with "kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds them all." And the full significance of this comes home to us when Lloyd George says, "The real battle front is not in Flanders or France. The real battle front is in the soul of our people."

A LITTLE MATTER OF LABEL

THE man who has not forgotten his faith and hope in a governed world is hard put to it these days to find for himself a name that will mean anything and not at the same time get him into jail. We do not refer to the conscientious objector whose name seems to suit him, and who has little concern about jails anyhow. We do not refer to the members of the "People's Council," who are seeking with a rather muricated quixotism to establish "a representative body for the people," zealously overlooking with withers unwrung that not altogether unknown representative organ familiar to us as the United States Government, a bit of machinery upon which the people have been working with no little assiduity for over four generations. We are not thinking of Congressmen who seem to lose track of the ends for which this Government is striving—men, money, and might—as they pile up mountains of words in the interest of what used to be called "freedom of speech" and the "rights of Congress." We are not thinking of the college trustees and their hired men, the professors, who together are musing up our minds just now with discussion about "academic freedom," and that at a time when we are after real game. We are not thinking of any of the other syndicalists aiming at "quick action" in the direction of a reformed world by means of sabotage and other types of destructive propaganda. We refer to none of these, with their disregard for reflection, their pragmatic faith in pure intuition, their *élan vital*. They may get as excited as they wish over matters of constitutional import, and play joyfully that between friends the Constitution means something in time of war.

But the people to whom we refer are the sane among those who formerly were proud to be called "pacifists," the people who have taken and are taking their Government seriously in its avowed program that we are in this war to down militarism, to establish the modes of justice among the nations, and to end war. While they do not change their views, it is manifest that they must change their name, for in the *New York Times* of October 10 there is an editorial entitled "*They Never Make a Distinction*," which contains these words:

"No pacifist of any kind can ever talk or write about the war much more than a single sentence without revealing that he or she is possessed and obsessed by the strange belief that because war is a bad thing, all who take part in it are on the same moral level and open to the same condemnation. This is the absurd fallacy which underlies all pacifism and vitiates every argument offered by the followers of that miserable cult. As logic, the leap thus made from premise to conclusion is without the slightest warrant in either experience or fact, yet every pacifist is under some mysterious and inexorable compulsion to make it every time he discusses either war in general or this war in particular, and always the result is that sane critics are either angered or disgusted—or both."